



Commander
United States Coast Guard
Seventeenth Coast Guard District

P. O. Box 25517
Juneau, AK 99802-5517
Staff Symbol: moc
Phone: 907-463-2286
800-478-7369
FAX: 907-463-2299
e-mail:
sjorgensen@cgalaska.uscg.mil

April 2000

Proposed National Action Plan

From December 1, 1998 and January 31, 1999, there were 20 fishing vessel casualties, which resulted in the loss of 19 lives. As a result, the Coast Guard chartered a National Fishing Vessel Safety Task Force to evaluate the 20 casualties, review the existing fishing vessel safety program and recommend measures that would have a great potential for reducing loss of life and property. The Task Force issued a report that contains 59 recommendations to improve commercial fishing vessel safety. Based on these recommendations the Coast Guard developed a National Action Plan which contains three short-term action items for Coast Guard action and eight long-term action items, some of which could have a major impact on commercial fishermen.

The national Action Plan is not yet regulation, but is a proposal. Coast Guard Headquarters personnel in Washington, D.C. are seeking input concerning these action items, both positive and negative. Your comments are very important to the process. I encourage you to read the proposed National Action Plan. Please submit comments on the enclosed Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Action Plan Survey. If you have questions, please contact Sue Jorgensen at 800-478-7369 (Alaska) or 907-463-2286.

proposed National Action Plan

3 short-term items for Coast Guard action:

- ☐ increase the Fishing Vessel Safety staff to increase emphasis on the fishing vessel safety program
- ☐ share data and assist in profiling high risk fisheries and focus resources on those fisheries
- ☐ increase the Coast Guard's outreach by sharing lessons learned

Long-term action items will focus on:

- improving drill enforcement
- completing the regulatory project on stability and water tight integrity begun in 1992
- improving casualty investigations and analysis
- improving communications
- coordinate fisheries management with fishing vessel safety
- seek authority and funding for mandatory vessel examinations
- seek authority and funding for mandatory safety training
- request the line used for safety equipment be changed from the Boundary Line to the Territorial Sea Baseline

1. Enforcement of required Emergency Preparedness Drills: Emergency drills are required but not always conducted. This action item will require logging required drills.

2. Complete the regulatory Project on Stability and Watertight Integrity: applies to *new fishing vessels less than 79 feet*. Stability regulations already exist for *new vessels 79 feet or greater*.

3. Improve Casualty Investigations and Analysis: The Coast Guard is conducting detailed review and analysis of more than 1,100 fishing vessel casualty cases to identify causal factors.

4. Improve Communications: Better communicate “lessons learned” and “best practices”. Coast Guard is developing a national fishing vessel safety newsletter and a fishing vessel safety Web Page.

5. Coordinate Fishery Management with Safety: Fishery management decisions greatly affect safety of fishermen. A decision to permit fishing, *only* within a short time window, influences fishermen to fish during that time period in order to make a living. Although an effective fishery management tool, this sometimes leads to marine casualties and the loss of life when the short time window coincides with poor weather conditions.

District Fishing Vessel Safety Coordinators attend Fishery Council meetings and provide advice on management decisions that might affect the safety of fishermen.

6. Mandatory Fishing Vessel Safety Examinations: To implement this, the Coast Guard will draft and submit a legislative change proposal to Congress. If exams were *mandatory*, examiners would conduct more exams and evaluate the fleets' overall structural and watertight integrity. *Mandatory* exams would probably be similar to our existing *voluntary* exams.

7. Mandatory Training Based Certificate Program: To implement this, the Coast Guard will draft and submit a legislative change proposal to Congress. Based on casualty investigations a safety training deficiency exists in the fishing industry. This concept is being developed, but a traditional merchant mariners license will not be required.

8. Substitute Territorial Sea Baseline for Boundary Line for determining safety equipment carriage requirements. To implement this, the Coast Guard will draft and submit a legislative change proposal to Congress.

The Boundary Line varies widely: in southern California the line is beyond 50 miles from shore; in the Gulf of Mexico, the line is 12 miles from shore, in Alaska, all of Southeast, all of Cook Inlet and all of Prince William Sound are inside the Boundary Line. Vessels operating inside the Boundary Line are not required to have items such as bilge pumps, anchors or communications equipment, or to conduct safety drills.

Territorial Sea Baseline appears to be a more consistent reference in relation to the coastline and safety equipment requirements could be based on threat, rather than an arbitrary line.

The final three proposed action items, Numbers 6, 7 and 8, could have a significant impact on commercial fishermen. This is an opportunity for fishermen to voice their opinions on these proposals, whether positive or negative.

